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SOUTH ASIA EARTHQUAKE TASK FORCE
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ANE DEPUTY ASSISTANT ADMINISTRATOR MARK WARD
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SUBJECT: PAKISTAN - EARTHQUAKE: USAID/DART MONITORS
DISTRIBUTION OF RELIEF COMMODITIES IN ALLAI VALLEY

REF: Islamabad 18328

SUMMARY

1. On December 11, 2005, the US Military provided helicopter transport to Pashtu and Gangwal villages in the remote earthquake-affected Allai Valley for three USAID/DART members, the Commander of the 3rd Marine Hospital Shinkiar and Mansehra, and the US Embassy's Mansehra Forward Operating Base Officer in Charge (OIC). The team was accompanied by a representative from USAID partner NGO, Save the Children US (SC-US), which is working in eight Union Councils in the Allai Valley. Due to access constraints to this area, air support is imperative for transport of emergency relief. SC-US is distributing urgently needed household and shelter kits and food to these areas, and plans to cover the eight union councils by December 23. Distribution is ongoing, and is addressing the particular issue of women's access to relief in these communities. The USAID/DART will continue to conduct field visits to monitor humanitarian conditions in affected areas. End summary.

Limited Access to Pashtu and Gangwal

2. On December 11, the US Military facilitated site visits by helicopter to two villages in the remote earthquake-affected Allai Valley for three USAID/DART members, the Commander of the 3rd Marine Hospital Shinkiar and Mansehra, and the US Embassy's Mansehra Forward Operating Base OIC. The team was accompanied by a representative from USAID partner SC-US, which is working in eight Union Councils in the Allai Valley, including Pashtu, a village located at 5,161 feet, with a population of approximately 17,000 people, and Gangwal, which had 12,000 residents, and is located at 5,413 feet.

3. Descent into the valley was striking in that homes throughout the region were nestled into steep hillsides-many close to the tree-line on snow-clad mountains. Gusts of wind made landing difficult in Pashtu, and provided a strong indication that winter conditions are at the doorstep of the valley's residents. The USAID/DART noted that helicopter assistance is imperative for transporting relief items to this area. According to SC-US staff, the one road providing access to Pashtu has been blocked since the October 8 earthquake, and the primary means of movement between the larger town of Banna, located in the main Allai Valley, and Pashtu village is a steep trail that drops deeper into the valley.

Distributions In Progress

4. During the USAID/DART's visit to Pashtu, a distribution of non-food items (NFIs) was underway for a targeted 2,000 households to receive winter shelter and/or household kits, containing plastic sheeting, saws, hammers, picks, wire, nails, axes, stoves, shawls, and blankets. (Note: SC-US is targeting distributions of food and shelter and household kits to an estimated 12,288 households in Pashtu, Bateela,

Rashang, Banna, Biari, Sakargah, Jambera, and Batkool union councils in the Allai Valley. End note). SC-US is providing the kits to 2-3 villages a day, with plans to cover all 25 villages by December 23 if weather conditions permit.

15. SC-US has also completed a survey in Gangwal village, Rashang Union Council, and already delivered shelter and household kits to half of the 1,700 families identified for assistance. Similar to the distribution strategy employed throughout SC-US operational areas, households at higher elevations—as high as 7,000 feet in Rashang—are receiving priority for distribution of the kits.

16. The UN Humanitarian Air Service (UNHAS) has been providing the necessary helicopter support to airlift these relief commodities. SC-US staff reported that in the past week, UNHAS delivered a combination of food and emergency supplies, with airlifts of NFIs exclusively in the last four days in response to the urgent need for transport of shelter and winterization materials. The USAID/DART observed that the GOP military, CARE, and Swiss Humanitarian Aid have also provided relief to this village, and another NGO has just arrived to help the Pashtu people construct dome tents.

Women's Access to Relief and Services

17. During the course of the visit, USAID/DART members observed only a few women in the distance, in the midst of hundreds of men and boys who were lined up to receive household and shelter kits. The ability of women to access relief remains one of the foremost concerns of the USAID/DART. In an effort to ensure that women are not excluded, SC-US worked with community members and local NGOs to identify beneficiaries through a community survey. Among the most vulnerable population, widows and female-headed households received priority. In Pashtu, SC-US identified 214 widows with the assistance of the local population. As these women were registered, they were given three "chits", or colored pieces of paper, which entitled them to a special relief package containing shelter and household kits and food. At the same time, the women were asked to select a trusted family/community representative who would be authorized to submit these chits for commodities to transport to the women's shelters. SC-US is following-up with monitoring activities and home visits to ensure that the materials reach each widow.

18. On December 6, SC-US established a temporary hospital in nearby Banna, staffed with male and female physicians, several of whom are Pashtu and Urdu speaking. Of particular note is that more than 60 women are lining up daily to access health care as a result of the presence of female doctors at the hospital. SC-US staff noted that some women in the community are receiving health services for the first time, as this access to services did not exist in the past. To improve access even more, SC-US plans to add a separate hospital entrance for women in the coming days.

19. SC-US efforts to ensure access for women to shelter materials and health services demonstrate how USAID/OFDA partners are providing equitable life-saving relief while respecting cultural sensitivities. In early January, a gender specialist will join the USAID/DART as a Protection Officer to address this and other gender concerns.

Shelter Remains Priority Concern

110. The USAID/DART paid special attention to the issue of food availability during the site visits to Pashtu and Gangwal and the flyover of the Allai Valley. Through SC-US, WFP has provided a 45-day ration for blanket distribution in Pashtu. Throughout the valley, the team observed mounds of recently reaped maize and wheat on the terraced rice paddies next to damaged homes. Some of the mounds were covered with plastic tarpaulin to protect the harvests from the elements. While it is unclear what percentage of the normal crop yields were lost as a result of the earthquake, the USAID/DART continues to find in interviews with villagers that food needs appear to be adequately addressed. At this juncture, shelter is the primary concern.

111. According to several residents who were waiting to receive their shelter kits, people generally want to stay in their communities, even in high elevation areas. This sentiment was corroborated by SC-US's field staff in Pashtu, many of whom are from the affected village.

112. Supplies for construction of sturdier shelters are in great demand. The USAID/DART continues to raise related questions about the viability of tents to withstand the harsh winters and whether or not villagers are "saving" tents. It may be that some people are safeguarding the tents that are too flimsy to live in, but could serve as

shelter for livestock and/or grain storage. The USAID/DART will continue to follow this issue in order to assure the best use of commodities distributed at these high elevations.

Water and Sanitation

13. Traditionally, villagers in these remote communities walk several miles to obtain potable water. Although there were some functioning pipes in Pashtu that provided a trickling of water, SC-US noted that pipes had been damaged and water availability is limited. In discussions with SC-US staff, the team learned that it is not uncommon for men to bathe infrequently during the winter months. Some men bathe when visiting the larger town of Banna, where they can purchase a bucket of hot water at a barber shop with special rooms for washing. However, this is reportedly not an option for women. These cultural hygiene habits are likely to have health implications for communities in "spontaneous" camps if more people move to these areas.

Conclusions

14. With the rapid onset of winter conditions, the USAID/DART continues to address the shelter needs of vulnerable populations. Based on the monitoring visit to Pashtu and Gangwal, distribution of key survival shelter and household kits appears to be proceeding on schedule. In particular, SC-US is recognizing the needs of women in obtaining relief commodities, specifically shelter materials and health services. On December 11, USAID airlifted an additional 6,000 sheets of tarpaulin and 2,500 blankets that can be used to insulate the walls and floor of tents or shelters per refetel. The USAID/DART will continue to conduct field visits to monitor humanitarian conditions.

15. The USAID/DART extends a special thanks to the US Military in Pakistan for its services in enabling the team and its partners access to conduct rapid assessments and monitor program progress.

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